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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 LAGOS 000838

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#) [PTER](#) [ENRG](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: IJAWS -- WHO ARE THEY AND WHY THEY MATTER

REF: A. 04 ABUJA 1715

[1](#)B. LAGOS 605

[1](#)C. LAGOS 507

[1](#)D. LAGOS 276

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne per 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Ijaws are the largest ethnic group in the volatile, oil-laden Niger Delta. As such, Ijaws view themselves as the legitimate stewards of the region's vast resources. Though united in the desire for "resource control," Ijaw leaders differ over how to attain that goal. These tactical differences are made more dissonant by clashing personal ambitions and competitive power seeking among the diffuse Ijaw leaders.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Politicians and Traditional rulers believe elected office the best vehicle for advancing Ijaw interests and have set their sights on the vice-presidency in 2007. Ijaw civil society groups advocate civic action and protest (sometimes violent) as the means to greater political participation and fiscal federalism. Militias such as Dokubo Asari's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) opt for violence and intimidation. By cloaking themselves in nationalistic ideology, militias draw from a wellspring of Ijaw discontent, inspiring adherents and admirers, while frightening their elder kith.

[1](#)3. (C) Bayelsa State Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha is the most prominent Ijaw. Yet he is far from being a dominant figure. Moreover, the youth leaders seem to inspire more support than the older traditional rulers and elected officials. Among the youth, there is a discernable trend toward a more militant nationalism, speckled with violence, and rhetorical hints of separation. Unless the Delta sees more economic and political development, this militant trend will continue. Moreover, it could undermine US interests in the Delta and the overall stability of this important tract of Nigeria's real estate. End Summary and Comment.

IJAWS -- THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL HOPE

[1](#)4. (SBU) As the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta and the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, Ijaws believe they have been under represented in national politics. More than ever, they are clamoring to cure this perceived slight. Those Ijaws operating within the mainstream political framework have set their sights on controlling the south-south geopolitical zone and through this vehicle, placing one of their own in the vice presidency in 2007, preferably within the PDP. A second goal is to occupy the gubernatorial seats in Bayelsa, Rivers, and possibly Delta states.

[1](#)5. (C) Bayelsa Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, an archetypal "big man" politician is the most likely VP candidate among the Ijaws (ref C). Alamieyeseigha is the sole Ijaw governor and serves as "godfather" to many Ijaw traditional chiefs and junior politicians. The presidents of the umbrella Ijaw civil society groups, the Ijaw National Congress (INC) and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), are also beholden to him. Alamieyeseigha has Bayelsa's treasury at his disposal. In the last four years, federal oil allocations to Bayelsa state totaled over 100 billion Naira or roughly 800 million dollars. Though widely acknowledged as a spendthrift who blurs the line between official and personal outlays, Alamieyeseigha gets credit for implementing some development projects in Bayelsa, namely roads, health care facilities, and a fledgling university. Recent press reports intimate the ICPC or EFCC may investigate the governor. For now Alamieyeseigha's camp is nonplussed telling us, they have "nothing to hide."

[1](#)6. (C) The governor is relatively popular among Ijaws. He has gained support from his public advocacy for increased political representation, fiscal federalism, and the desire for state jurisdiction over the politic service. Ijaws have also appreciated his "hands-on" personal involvement in containing community violence. Of course, Alamieyeseigha's lavish patronage helps buttress this popular support.

[1](#)7. (C) The governor had hitched himself tightly to current Vice President Atiku Abubakar. While still close, Alamieyeseigha has drawn some distance between him and the

Vice President as the VP's fortunes in the PDP diminish as a result of his cold war with President Obasanjo. To win the VP nod for 2007, Alamieyeseigha realizes he will need northern support. Thus he has launched a conscious campaign to win the favor of key northern power-brokers and elites. Given Alamieyeseigha's ample financial resources and the importance of the Niger Delta, former head of state Babangida has also sent feelers to the governor about possibly joining his presidential ticket in 2007, according to a Babangida insider.

18. (Comment: An Ijaw VP (Alamieyeseigha or otherwise) would presumably advocate the Federal government give oil-producing states more than the 13% of oil revenues currently allocated. The success of such an effort is uncertain. However, in any event, an Ijaw vice president would be able to dispense considerable patronage to loyal subjects. His elevation would help quiet the lament that the Niger Delta has been Nigeria's financial lifeline, but "its sons" have yet to ascend to the senior ranks of national political office. If an Ijaw does not become vice-president in 2007, most contacts predict these mainstream adherents will not abandon electoral politics. They will just sharpen their plans for 2011. End Comment)

IJAWS FOR GOVERNOR AND OTHER INFLUENTIAL POLITICIANS

19. (C) With financial and street muscle behind him, Dr. Abiye Sekibo, current Federal Minister of Transportation, is the apparent front-runner to succeed Peter Odili as Governor of Rivers State. Sekibo, an Ijaw from Okrika, Rivers State, is widely acknowledged as having armed and helped finance Ateke Tom's NDVG, in order to "carry" the 2003 elections for Rivers Governor Peter Odili and the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). Sekibo reportedly continues to fund the NDVG and to play a key role in stoking conflict between rival militias as he prepares for his gubernatorial run in 2007. Although a leading candidate, Sekibo is divisive and could further fragment Ijaw politics in Rivers State.

110. (C) Sekibo's archrival is Chief Rufus Ada George--also from Okrika. George was Rivers Governor between 1990 and 1992. George is a prominent chieftain within the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and many identify him as having helped launch Dokubu Asari's NDPVF as a counterweight to the NDVG. Some contacts speculate that if IBB is in the market for an Ijaw vice presidential running mate, he will seriously consider his "former man" George.

11. (C) The executive director of Finance and Administration for the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Timi Alaibe, occupies an enviable seat. Alaibe lost the 2003 Bayelsa gubernatorial race. Alaibe reportedly is tied to numerous armed gangs and cults in Bayelsa. Alaibe will run for governor again in 2007 and may win this time. However, he will have rough sledding if Alamieyeseigha does not endorse him. Alamieyeseigha is no fan of Alaibe and he would probably prefer his deputy, Jonathan Goodluck, succeed him. However, the need to win the favor of players who will help him in his vice presidential quest, may force Alamieyeseigha away from anointing Goodluck. In any event, Bayelsa will continue to have an Ijaw governor. If the Ijaws do not get the VP slot, that individual may remain the highest-level elected Ijaw elected politician.

SECOND TIER - POLITICAL LIGHTS

12. (SBU/NF) Other influential Ijaw political figures include: Prince Uche Secondus, Chairman of the PDP in Rivers State; Chief Albert Horsfall, founding Director General of both the Nigeria Intelligence Agency and the State Security Service (SSS); and Chief Lulu Briggs, who unsuccessfully contested the 2003 gubernatorial elections in Rivers, but remains active in politics. Sekibo, Secondus, Horsfall, and Briggs are members of Odili's kitchen cabinet and buy, coerce, or otherwise help manipulate Ijaw "support" for Odili, an Igbo. The Ijaw technocrat roster includes Presidential Adviser for Petroleum Matters, Dr. Dakuro and the Federal Minister of Science and Technology, Dr. Isoun, neither of whom are politically ambitious.

MILITIA GROUPS -- THE CNN CALIBER

13. (SBU/NF) The three major militias operating in the Niger Delta are Dokkubo Asari's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Ateke Tom's Niger Delta Vigilante Group (NDVG), and Oboko Bello's Federal Niger Delta Ijaw Community (FINDIC). Contacts tell us there are dozens of smaller, localized armed Ijaw coalitions, whose members periodically contract to work for these larger militias. Neither the large nor small militias have strong command

structures and members may only drift together for specific actions. Regarding the smaller formations, many do not even have a moniker. However, fealty to these local, smaller groups is much more robust than to the larger militias (Ref B). Moreover, these smaller groups are often very well-armed, having fewer members to dissipate finite resources.

14. (SBU/NF) Dokubo Asari and Ateke Tom became household names in Nigeria in the fall of 2004 after fighting between their rival militias crippled the capital of Rivers State, Port Harcourt. Dozens were killed and hundreds displaced. Numerous threats were made against oil installations, causing some disruptions in operations and temporary evacuations of staff. In the end, the presidency invited the two groups for discussions in Abuja. A peace agreement, which called for demobilization, an arms buy-back program, and social reintegration programs, was the end-product of these talks (refs A and B).

15. (S/NF) Asari now is under pressure from his own militia members and from the larger Ijaw community who applauded his firebrand ideology and brazen tactics. Many perceive him as having "sold-out" during his meetings with the presidency. Most ordinary Ijaw citizens do not believe the "peace agreement" advanced their fundamental issues. In addition, Asari's lieutenants are bitter because they say they never saw the financial proceeds from the disarming/demobilizing program. In May, a group of disenchanted members announced they were leaving NDPVF to create their own organization. (Comment: RAO sources say Rivers Governor Odili has recruited one of these splinter leaders as a counterweight to Asari. The source claims the governor is currently arming this new group. See TD 31412070505 for more details.) Ateke Tom, who unlike Asairi, remained largely under the control of his political progenitors, has kept a relatively low profile since fall 2004. However, this group remains well armed and poised to intervene in the upcoming 2007 elections.

16. (C) FINDIC, based in Delta state, is lead by Oboko Bello, who acts as spokesperson and political figurehead and Government Ekpomupolo (widely referred to by his first name), who serves as military leader. While FINDIC appears to concentrate more on oil bunkering than do the NDPVF and NDVG, this is not their only focus. The group is also involved in the inter-ethnic-Ijaw/Itsekeri-disputes in Warri. FINDIC spouts the strongest version of Ijaw nationalism and the perceived right to resource control.

THE SMALLER MILITIAS/GANGS

17. (SBU/NF) The dozens of smaller armed groups dispersed throughout Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa states represent amorphous collections of individuals who band together for specific actions, such as robbing or extorting money from oil and oil service companies. These groups may be associated with a particular traditional religious rite or practice. Politicians also may finance them, again for specific purposes, e.g. political intimidation in a local council election. Contacts report the groups are astonishingly well-armed, some with weaponry that rivals or surpasses that of the major militias. Recent examples of actions carried out by these sorts of groups include the February 2005 Odioma incident in Bayelsa state, where Teme cult members allegedly killed 12 members of a delegation, including four local council members, who were attempting to resolve a dispute concerning which local community should receive benefits from Shell Petroleum Development corporation (SPDC) as the designated "host-community." (Ref D).

18. (SBU/NF) Thus far these localized groups have tended to act independently. Part of Asari's success last year was in managing to recruit members from a variety of these small dispersed groups. In the words of one Ijaw contact, Asari was the first to "mobilize violence across creek boundaries, and state lines." The contact added this effort was made not because "Asari was so smart," but rather because he had no choice. "He was outflanked in Rivers State by Ateke Tom, the Nigerian Military Joint Task Force (JTF) was breathing down his neck, having been sicced on him by his former patrons, Asari was, thus, compelled to be innovative." The gambit paid off, at least in the short term. Asari's rank swelled and though his affiliates continued to bear first allegiance to their local groupings, they did also support Asari.

IJAW CIVIL SOCIETY

19. (SBU) The INC and IYC are the most prominent Ijaw Civil Society associations and even militia leaders such as Asari identify them as the legitimate "voice" for the Ijaw people. The INC was founded in 1992 with Chief Joshua Fumudoh of Delta state as its first president. Fumudoh is widely

credited with helping formulate a cohesive Ijaw platform. Fumudoh is currently as federally nominated delegate at the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC), which disaffect Ijaw youth say is appropriate commentary on how mainstream the INC has become. The INC's current president Kemi Okoko of Bayelsa State is also a delegate to the confab. Ijaws give the INC an "A" in articulating Ijaw interests. However, many, particularly the youth, give the organization an "F" in achieving meaningful results. Part of the problem, according to the youths, is that the INC is only willing to use constitutionally-sanctioned methods to advance the Ijaw platform. The other part of the problem is that many INC leaders have been co-opted by the Nigerian political establishment. Aside from its president Okoko, other influential leaders within the INC include F. J. Williams (Ondo), Joseph Evah (Delta) and Graham Douglas (Rivers).

20. (SBU) The IYC was founded in 1998 by Felix Tudelo of Delta State. Oyini Jonjo of Bayelsa is the current president, but Tudelo remains influential within the group. IYC members insist the organization is not a youth-wing of the INC. Rather, it was formed because Ijaws believed more confrontational tactics were needed than those employed by the INC. The IYC, they say, was conceived to be more "action-oriented." Members say, unlike the INC, they are prepared to insist oil companies invest more in the community development and to use the companies as a lever with the federal government to advance the broader objective of resource control. Like any organization, IYC has its hawks and doves--with the hawks preferring violence as a methodology and the doves advocating civil disobedience.

21. (SBU) Asari, a former treasurer and current member of the IYC, is among the hawks. From the organization's inception, he advocated "armed rebellion." Though now a convert to Islam, IYC members tell us Asari has not relinquished his penchant for quoting the Bible in explaining why change needs to come through force. Asari and other militia/gang leaders are intermittent participants in IYC activities, showing up for the headline events such as national conferences, but not much involved in the day-to-day running of the organizations.

22. (SBU/NF) To the disappointment of many Ijaw youths, the IYC has not fared much better than the INC in moving forward the Ijaw agenda. The IYC leadership is fractured and co-opted. Its leadership spends much of its time lambasting the INC as opposed to developing appropriate political strategies. This lack of a viable civil society alternative is a long-term feeder into the militias.

TRADITIONAL RULERS -- LONG ON CEREMONY SHORT ON POWER

23. (SBU) Traditional Ijaw rulers have lost much of their relevance. They are looked to for ceremonial functions or for moral suasion. However, for the most part government actors, oil companies, and increasingly radicalized Ijaw youth, no longer treat seriously with traditional rulers. Moreover stripped of their former official governmental stipend, many rulers have been co-opted by the various political figures on whom they depend for their livelihoods.

24. (SBU) That said, some traditional rulers are hanging on to the last vestiges of influence/relevance and speak out for Ijaw interests and occasionally help resolve disputes between rival communities, gangs and militias. The list includes:

Chief EK Clarke of Warri, Delta State. Chief Clarke is a former federal Minister of Education. While he once may have harbored ambitions to return to political office, failing health has kept the septuagenarian sidelined recently.

King Alfred Diète-Spiff of Brass, Bayelsa. The king now in his mid-60s, became the first military governor of Rivers State at the young age of 27. He is thus a blend of military and traditional background. He has many peers in the government and is a delegate on the on-going National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) in Abuja.

King William Dappa-Pepple of Bonny Island. The king's influence is largely due to the billions of dollars of investment located in natural gas projects situated on the island.

COMMENT

25. (C) Ijaws, like most Nigerians, want to be on the side of the winner. If mainstream Ijaw politicians are seen as successfully advancing their core interests, many Ijaws will support non-violent political strategies. However, many Ijaws, particularly the youth, continue to feel marginalized and believe the current national structure of mainstream

plutocracy runs adverse to their interests. Against this backdrop, many Ijaws feel that more militant, even radical, approaches are necessary to win the political and economic concessions they seek. The lack of effective Ijaw civil society organizations is troublesome. If such organizations were to become more effective and the doves within them are strengthened, Ijaws would perhaps be able to advance their interests within a nonviolent context. In their absence, aggrieved Ijaws look for other avenues to redress, such as the militias.

126. (C) USG interests are threatened if the militias with their inchoate yet violent brand of ethnic nationalism become seen as the best vehicle through which to channel Ijaw aspiration and grievance. Projection of USG long-term interests in the Delta region hinges on keeping large swaths of Ijaw youth from becoming irreversibly disaffected from the conventional political and economic system. On the political side, USG support for electoral reform is vital so the electoral burlesque of 2003 is not repeated in 2007. On the economic side, labor-intensive development is needed to take young men out of the creeks and to replace their weapons with productive work tools.

BROWNE